Indian Journal of Science and Technology 2016 vol.9 N11

Frequency-based relevant grammar features of the Caucasian languages

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Abstract

Background/Objectives: The article regards the areal community of the Caucasian languages aiming to reveal relevant features of each family and suggest hypotheses on the development of separate representatives of each family. Methods/Statistical Analysis: The main tool for the research is the database "Languages of the World" of Institute of Linguistics of Russian Academy of Sciences. A relatively new method of feature detection built on contrast queries was applied. Particularly, the study separately compared the features of each group of the Caucasian languages to the Altaic language family and revealed a set of features characteristic only of the language family under study. Findings: The languages from the areal community of the Caucasian languages were regarded from the point of view of their relevant features - features that occur in most languages of a family under study, but are very rare in other families. For each group of the Caucasian languages a core of relevant features was found. Based on these results, as well as on the results of the applied variation method, we made an attempt to trace back the structural evolution of the Caucasian languages. Moreover, the variation method showed that the relevant features of a language family are not necessarily genealogic, i.e. they could be absent in the parent languages. Several hypotheses on the development of separate Caucasian languages from the groups of languages were suggested. Applications/Improvements: The research is a good basis for further inquiries on the development of the Caucasian languages. Moreover, it presents an example of the method for contrast queries application in studying the evolution of language families.

http://dx.doi.org/10.17485/ijst/2016/v9i11/89415

Keywords

Contrast query, Relevant features, The Caucasian languages